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# THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

121

Peace in 1939?
The Enfield poltergeist
The greatest medium?
Inside the UFO nests
The perfect murder

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# THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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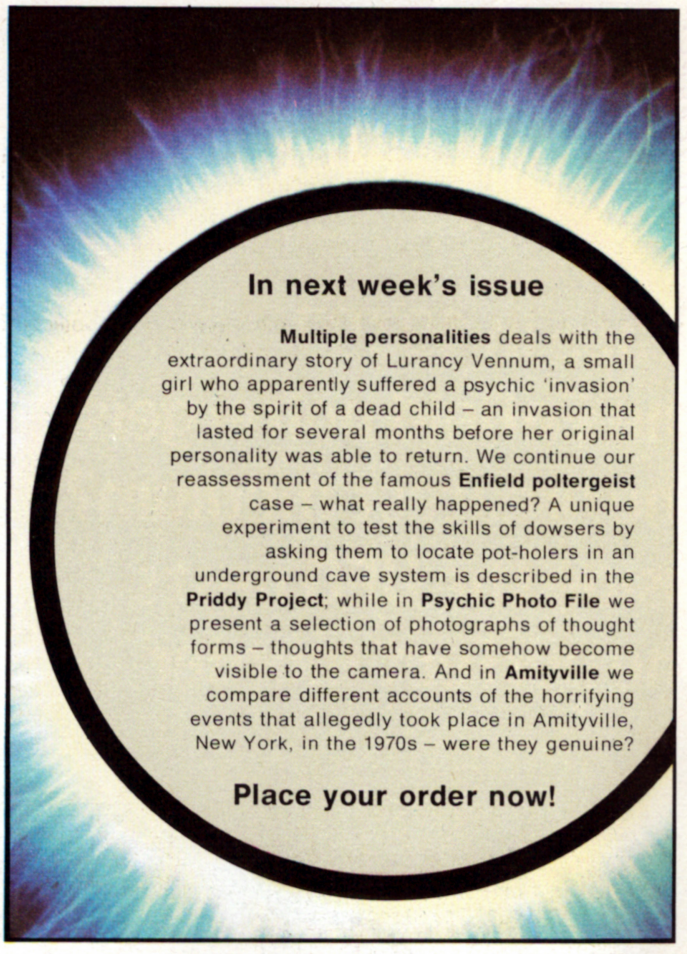



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# Enfield: the trouble begins

**In the late 1970s a family in north London became the focus of a poltergeist attack – and a great deal of publicity. One of the investigators, GUY LYON PLAYFAIR, tells the story of the Enfield poltergeist**

THE ENFIELD POLTERGEIST first made itself known at about 9.30 p.m. on 31 August 1977. Mrs Harper, a divorcee in her mid forties, was putting two of her four children to bed in one of the three upstairs bedrooms of her semi-detached council house in Enfield, north London, when Janet, aged 11, and one of her brothers, aged 10, complained that something was making a 'shuffling noise'. Shortly afterwards, Mrs Harper was astonished to see a heavy chest of drawers moving about 18 inches (46 centimetres) along the floor, well beyond the reach of either child's feet. She pushed it back into place, but it moved again, as before, and this time it refused to budge when she tried to move it. At about the same time, there were four loud knocks that seemed to come from the party wall.

Mrs Harper, as she recalled about a week later, began literally to shake with fear. She was convinced, as were her usually exuberant children, that something was going on that did not have a normal explanation. Her immediate reaction was just to get out of the house. She thought of calling on her brother John Burcombe, who lived six doors up the road. But her immediate neighbours, Vic and Peggy Nottingham, still had their lights on, so it was to them she first turned for help.

The knocking sounds began again as Vic and his son were making a thorough search of the house. As Vic walked down the stairs, the noise seemed to come from the wall right beside him. He immediately searched both front and back gardens, but saw no sign of anybody.

They called the police at about 11 p.m., and in the presence of one of the two constables who were soon on the scene, a chair in the living room slid along the floor more or less as the chest of drawers had done a couple of hours earlier. WPC Carolyn Heeps later signed a written statement to this effect, thereby testifying to at least one genuine phenomenon on the very first day of the case.

The following day, marbles and pieces of toy brick began to fly around the house at great speed. Some, when picked up, were found to be unusually hot. This aerial bombardment went on for three days, and by

As objects fly about the room the Harper children show obvious signs of distress (below), with the exception of Janet (centre), who merely smiles. She seemed to be the focus of the poltergeist activity – the very existence of which was hotly disputed even among the psychical researchers who investigated the case. But whatever really took place in that council house in Enfield, in north London, the world's press seized on the story with avidity (bottom)

The Harper family and their neighbours await the next attack by flying objects. Left to right are: neighbours Mrs Nottingham and her son Gary, Mrs Harper and her children – John, Rose and Janet

Sunday 4 September both the Harpers and the Nottinghams were at their wits' end. By then, they had called the police again, sought help from the local vicar and from a local lady who claimed to be a medium, but all to no avail. The Harpers had never heard of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), and the only course of action they could think of was to call the *Daily Mirror*. They were not seeking publicity; they just wanted somebody to tell them what on earth was going on.

Reporter Douglas Bence and photographer Graham Morris spent Sunday evening with the Harpers. Nothing happened until just after they left at about 2.30 on Monday morning, when the toy brick blitz promptly restarted. Peggy Nottingham's father called them back just as they were driving off.

### A violent reaction

Morris, a veteran Fleet Street freelancer with experience of several violent street demonstrations, had always managed to dodge flying bricks while working. But not this time. As he stood in the living-room doorway, with everybody visible through his wide-angle lens, a sharp-cornered toy brick hit him hard on the forehead at the moment he pressed his shutter. (When I met him a week later, he still had a large bruise.)

Senior reporter George Fallows was sufficiently impressed by his colleagues' experience to follow up the story himself. It was he who explained to the Harpers that what was happening was something known as poltergeist activity, and he suggested calling in the SPR. He also asked Mrs Harper if she wanted to move house, knowing that some council tenants have, in fact, created 'haunted houses' in the hope of jumping the rehousing queue. Her reply was 'definitely not!'

The SPR became involved in the case as the result of a series of coincidences. Maurice Grosse, a businessman and inventor, had been a member for barely a year despite a life-long interest in the paranormal. He had joined after what seemed to him an unusual string of inexplicable events that followed the death of his youngest daughter Janet after a road accident in 1976, and he had repeatedly asked the SPR secretary to give him a case of his own to investigate, preferably within reach of his north London home. Therefore, when George Fallows telephoned from Enfield, secretary Eleanor O'Keeffe lost no time in calling Grosse, who in turn went at once to the scene, arriving within a couple of hours of Fallows's call.

He witnessed nothing paranormal on his first visit. He was certain of one thing, however: the atmosphere of fear in the Harpers' home was real. That, he reckoned, could not be faked.

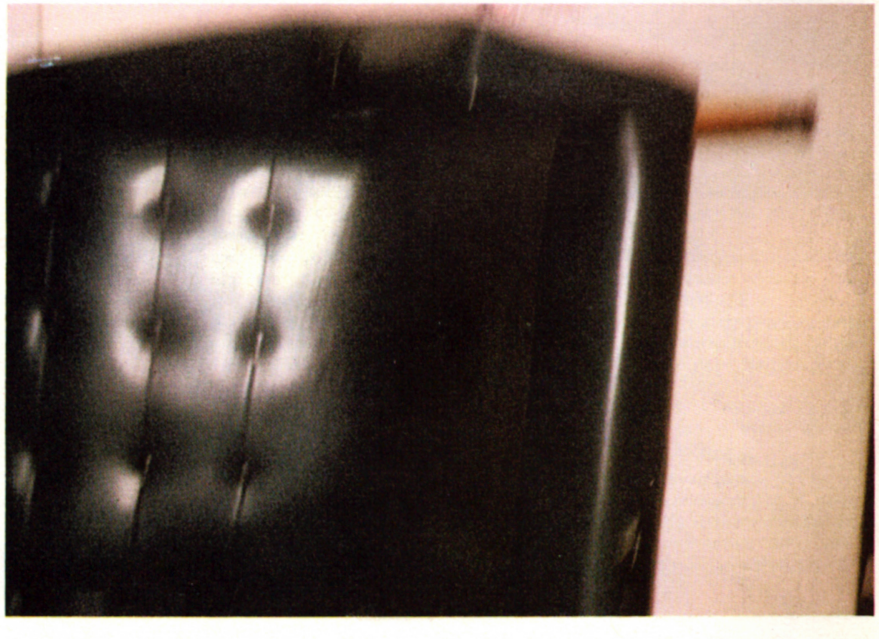
It was on 8 September that he had his first close encounter with a poltergeist. On that day, the SPR met to hear a lecture, arranged several months previously, by its librarian Mr Nicholas Clark-Lowes. His subject – poltergeists. At discussion time, Grosse leapt to his feet to announce that he was investigating one right now, and would appreciate some help.

### Enter Maurice Grosse

There was not a single volunteer. I happened to be sitting next to Grosse, but did not even volunteer myself. I had seen plenty of poltergeist activity during the years I lived in Brazil, but I had written up and published all my cases and moved on to other interests.

'Let me know if you get really stuck,' I said, without much enthusiasm, as I headed for the local pub with some friends. But Grosse went straight to Enfield, and between 10 and 11 p.m. he witnessed more paranormal activity than most SPR members have seen in a lifetime. It was just three days after his début as an investigator of such matters.

Below and below right: a settee flies, ending in a disastrous heap at the other side of the room



First, a marble whizzed through the air towards him; it was definitely not thrown by any of the children. Next, the chimes on the living-room wall began to sway to and fro, which, he found, they did not normally do even when the doorbell connected to them was rung. He then saw a door open and close by itself with nobody anywhere near it – and not just once, but three or four times. This was followed by an incident identical to one I later witnessed myself, in which a shirt hopped off a pile of clothing on the kitchen table and fell to the floor. Finally, Grosse experienced one of the most frequently reported of poltergeist symptoms: a sudden cold breeze that seemed to move up from his feet to his head.

Janet Harper always seemed to be near the site of the action – although she was not always near enough to have caused the incidents by normal means – and Grosse therefore kept a close eye on her at all times. She had certainly not opened or closed the door, levitated the shirt, moved the chimes or, presumably, produced the cold breeze. However, she certainly played a few tricks of her own later in the case, as any experienced psychical researcher would expect since children are, after all, accustomed to imitating what they observe. In a French radio interview in 1982, Janet readily admitted to having done this. She wanted to see, she said, if the investigators would catch her out. And she added: 'And they always did.'

On 10 September 1977, the Enfield case made the front page of the *Daily Mirror*. The story was picked up by LBC radio (a London-based station), and that evening Grosse, Mrs Harper and Mrs Nottingham took part in a two-and-a-half-hour *Night Line* programme devoted to it. The following day, there was a detailed account in BBC Radio 4's lunchtime news broadcast by reporter Rosalind Morris, who gave her own first-hand impressions of a night in what the *Daily Mirror* had justifiably called 'The House of Strange Happenings'.

When informed about the strange goings-on at Enfield the Society for Psychical Research suggested that businessman Maurice Grosse (right) take up the case. It seemed that no one else was interested at that stage. Shortly afterwards, media reports convinced author Guy Lyon Playfair (below) that what was happening was genuine – and he joined Grosse in what was to prove a lengthy and controversial investigation. Playfair's book *This house is haunted* (1980) is a sympathetic view of the Harpers' nightmare

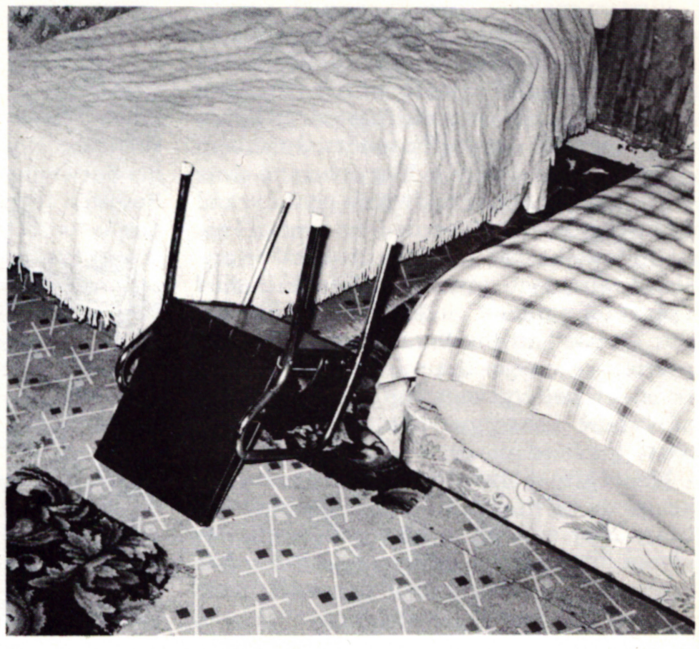
It became clear to me that the Enfield case could prove to be an exceptional one. It was already one of the very few to have been witnessed by an SPR member on the spot and within days of its inception. So I telephoned Maurice Grosse and offered my help, which was readily accepted. We agreed that since poltergeist cases seldom lasted more than a few weeks, we should take this opportunity to see a case through to its end. Had we known it would last for 14 months, we might have thought otherwise.

### Playing the rapping game

I witnessed a relatively minor incident on my first visit, on 11 September. As Graham Morris and I stood outside Janet's bedroom, frequently looking through the open door, a marble hit the linoleum floor right in front of my feet. It did not roll or bounce. The sound it made could be repeated only by deliberately *placing* it on the floor, which the two of us could clearly see that nobody had done.

Subsequent events were far more dramatic. The knocking on the walls and floors became an almost nightly occurrence, and its source seemed to have intelligence of a kind, since it would rap out answers to simple questions: one rap for no and two for yes. One evening, during a lengthy 'rap session', Grosse asked how many years ago the supposed entity had lived in the house, as it had previously claimed to have done. There followed no less than 53 raps, heard and recorded on tape by both of us while everybody was in full view. Shortly afterwards, however, the rapper began to beat out nonsensical rhythms, whereupon Grosse exclaimed: 'Are you having a game with me?'

Exactly two seconds later, a cardboard box full of soft toys and cushions took off from a corner of the bedroom, flew over the



bed and hit Grosse squarely on the forehead. It had travelled about 8 feet (2.5 metres), in his full view, and I was able to witness at least the end of its inexplicable flight. A BBC television team failed to replicate this.

On another occasion, I witnessed a large armchair slide along the floor after Janet – who had just got up from it and was walking towards me – and then crash over backwards. This, together with about 30 other incidents witnessed by either Grosse or myself, was recorded on tape at the time. (We indirectly witnessed several more, and reckon, at a very conservative estimate, that around 2000 inexplicable incidents were observed during the case, by about 30 different people.)

Photographer Graham Morris spent much of his spare time attempting to photograph something paranormal as it actually took place, which he eventually did; I believe him to be the first professional photographer to have done this.

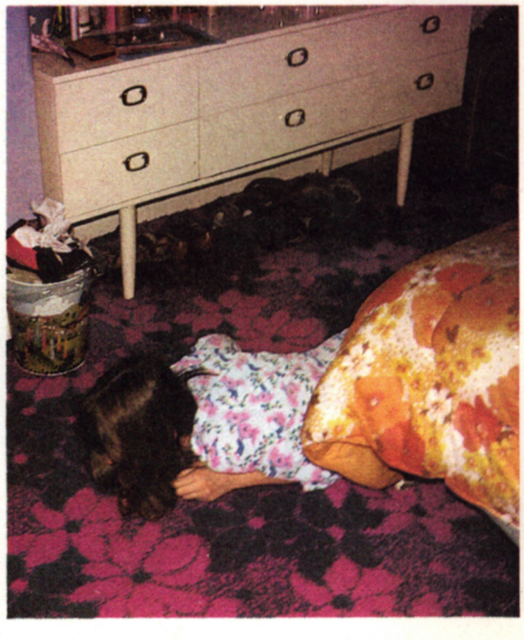
He soon found, however, that poltergeists are camera-shy. Moreover, they are skilled saboteurs. On one occasion, when he had fitted three separate cameras with flashguns so that they could be fired together by remote control, all three flashes were apparently drained of power shortly after being recharged. Eventually, after much patience, he managed to take two sequences on his motor-driven camera, with high-speed flash recharger, which still await satisfactory explanation.

Morris was not the only professional to suffer mechanical failure of his equipment. A team of enthusiastic ghost hunters from the electrical firm Pye of Cambridge brought along a Newvicon infra-red-sensitive television camera, with which we hoped to do some remote monitoring of the bedroom. The company's chief demonstrator carefully checked all his equipment before entering the house, but when he began filming his videotape deck behaved very oddly. All the lights on the machine went on at once, and the tape became jammed so firmly that the entire deck had to be dismantled to free it. And almost the same thing happened later to one of Rosalind Morris's BBC reel-tape recorders.

Above: for four days two *Daily Mirror* reporters and two of its photographers joined Grosse and Playfair's vigil in the Harper household. On one occasion reporter Douglas Bence and photographer David Thorpe were standing just outside an empty bedroom when they heard 'an almighty bang'. They investigated and found that a metal-framed chair had apparently flung itself 4 feet (1.2 metres) from its original position. Shortly after they left the room they heard another crash and discovered that the chair had moved to yet another position

Grosse and I lost count of the number of times our cassette tapes were found to be mysteriously broken, or wiped wholly or partially clean. I also discovered that one of my recorders had a metal part bent inside it, to the complete bewilderment of the repairman, while on one memorable evening the machine disappeared altogether for about an hour, reappearing underneath a heavy dressing-table that had fallen forwards, landing on Janet's bed and nearly squashing her.

The activity soon became so regular and intense that Grosse and I were faced with a



dilemma: were we encouraging it just by being there? Should we go away and hope it would stop? We did this twice, and were urgently asked to come back on both occasions. It has been suggested that a poltergeist outbreak is a form, conscious or unconscious, of seeking attention. This may be so, yet the Harpers – who gained the attention of the world's press, radio and television – gave the impression at all times that they just wanted a return to normal life. For the researcher, another dilemma is that one cannot learn more about poltergeists – and find ways of helping families afflicted by them – without investigating them on the spot.

Grosse and I did what Mrs Harper and her brother John Burcombe repeatedly asked us to do: stay with them and try to end the phenomena. We sought the help of several mediums, all of whom achieved a degree of reduction in the activity. Indeed one of them, a young Dutchman named Dono Gmelig-Meyling, may have been responsible for the eventual ending of the case, in October 1978. We also were able to stop the phenomena, although only temporarily, by separating members of the family.

While the furniture continued to fly around, we felt that it would be in the interests of science to record as much data as possible to enable others to expand their knowledge of mental states, physical systems, and the now evident connection between the two that poltergeist phenomena indicate. We had no luck with psychologists, several of whom came to Enfield (and left without making any useful suggestions), or with local doctors and psychiatrists. We did manage to have Janet spend six weeks in the Maudsley Hospital in south London, where she underwent extensive tests for any signs of physical or mental abnormality – but none were found.

We were luckier with physicists, and Professor J. B. Hasted, head of the physics department at Birkbeck College, University of London, responded at once to our appeal for technical help by assigning his assistant David Robertson to the case for a whole week.

In psychical research, one tends to find what one seeks. The sceptic is confronted with evidence that only adds to his scepticism, whereas the mind of the open-minded tends to be opened even wider. This was certainly the case with Robertson, who already had considerable experience of paranormal physical phenomena in the form of metal bending, a field in which Professor Hasted had been working since 1974 (see page 858).

A few days after David Robertson had moved into the Harpers' home, an exceptionally bizarre series of events took place, in front of several witnesses.

*On page 2426: a public levitation and teleportation – what was happening?*

Although ostensibly paranormal phenomena took place in almost every part of the Harper household, the girls' bedroom seemed to be favoured most often. Both girls were said to be pulled out of bed by an invisible force (below and bottom, far left), while furniture seemed to take on a life of its own, such as the dressing table that nearly squashed Janet flat (bottom left). Bedclothes were often flung back or twisted (bottom right) as if by a very strong hand

# War, what war?

**Up to the very day of Britain's declaration of war in 1939 discarnate seers repeatedly announced that peace would prevail. With such a record, how credible is the idea of spirit prophecy? KEVIN McCLURE investigates**

PROPHECIES about the First World War were singularly inaccurate. Neither Nostradamus, nor astrology, nor the Spiritualists' communicators from beyond – let alone *Old Moore's Almanack* – seemed to be able to foretell the horror of the conflagration that came. It is true that the signs were hard to read. Indeed, the outbreak of war was not widely expected more than a few weeks before it happened. Whether that should affect prophecy or not, it appears that there were no accurate predictions that can be satisfactorily proved to have been made before August 1914.

The circumstances leading up to the Second World War were different. A great many intelligent people from Winston Churchill downwards knew full well what was likely to be in store for Europe several years before the war, and there were many non-specific prophecies deriving from common sense and attentive reading of the newspapers without reference to paranormal knowledge. Henry James Foreman's book *The story of prophecy* (1936) summarises that, 'War is predicted for the years 1936, 1937, 1938, and critical times for 1940–42.'

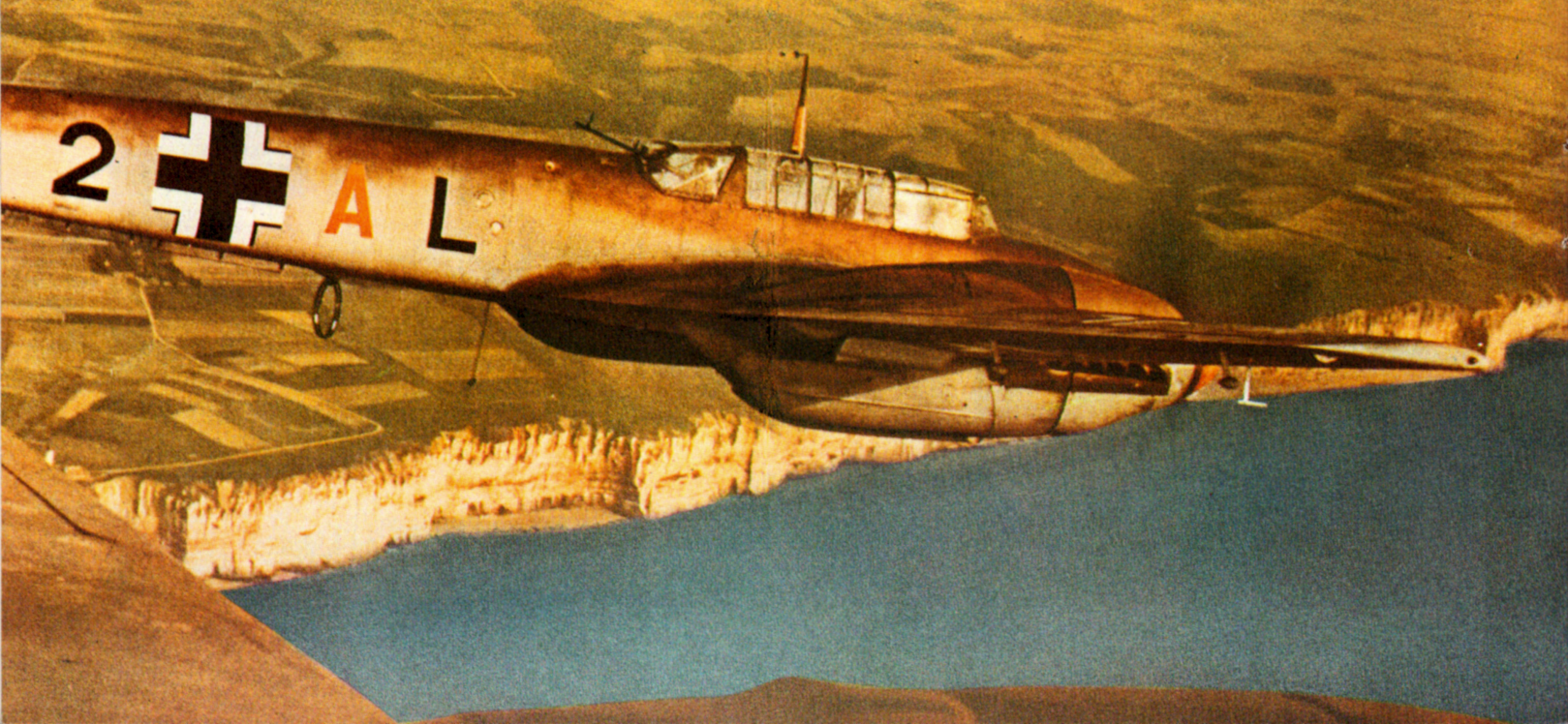
Prophecies that pre-date the Second World War by many years are generally few and poor. A certain Baron de Novaye apparently said sometime in the 19th century that a great crisis might 'burst forth in 1936, or in 1939, or in 1942'. *Great prophecies about the war*, a rather uncritical selection by Clarence Reed published in 1941, reports some predictions supposed to have been made by St Odile, the patron saint of Alsace, in the 7th century:

> The time is come when Germany shall be called the most bellicose nation upon Earth. The epoch is arrived when from her bosom shall arise the terrible warrior who shall undertake the world-war and who the people in arms shall call Antichrist, he who shall be cursed by the mothers as, like Rachel, they weep over their children. . . .
>
> He will win victories on land, by sea, and even in the air. For his warriors will be seen, winged, in unimaginable career, riding up into the firmament to catch the stars in order to hurl them down on towns and ignite great fires. The nations will be astonished and will exclaim: 'Whence comes the strength? How has he been able to undertake such a war?'

This is perspicacious prophesying indeed, to name Germany as a country and to anticipate air battles. It seems too good to be true.

Arguments continue, as they always will, about what the 16th-century French seer Nostradamus may have meant to say about the Second World War. Many of his prophecies about war may be relevant, but have already been used by interpreters with reference to other wars. Mostly, his predictions, in the form of quatrains, are so abstruse that any interpretation could be correct. Certainly, no commentator writing prior to 1939 managed to find in the quatrains a prediction of the Second World War. And in 1941, during the war, Nostradamus was cited as predicting its end by April 1942.

German bombs killed thousands of British civilians and devastated their cities as part of the inhuman blitz of the Second World War. Even when many non-psychics saw the inevitability of the conflict, the 'spirit' prophets were forecasting peace



As we look at prophecies about the Second World War, their connection with Spiritualism stands out. The period between the two world wars had been one of good fortune for Spiritualism. The demonstration of physical mediumship, now so rare, was common – and widely witnessed and photographed. The bereavements of the First World War had provided a ready support for Spiritualism, with many eager to try to reach their beloved dead through mediums. Spirit guides and communicators were powerful and important figures – in the 1930s, the pronouncements of guides were taken seriously by many, and they received excellent publicity in the two weekly Spiritualist newspapers, *Psychic News* and *Two Worlds.* The lead story in *Psychic News* of 19 March 1938 reflects the fear of war already present in its readership. It ran: '"For some years now I have told you there will be no war in your country, and I repeat there will be no war," declared White Hawk, guide of Kathleen Barkel, in a trance address at the Queen's Hall, London, on Sunday.' And in so saying, White Hawk set a pattern for the next 18 months, as the spirit world apparently became increasingly convinced that there was to be no European war.

On 7 January 1939, only two months before the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, *Psychic News* led with two more no-war prophecies. The first, from the president of the Spiritualist National Union Frank T. Blake, said:

> In the darkened skies, filled with the clouds of war, even now may be seen a rift through which the light of Peace is dimly shedding its rays. That rift will spread during the coming year and the radiant light will shine upon a world bathed in the glories of peace before the year 1939 has passed.

The second came from Red Cloud, the guide of the famous medium Estelle Roberts. It was said that he had correctly forecast that the crisis of September 1938 would pass. Citing his January 1939 statement, *Psychic News* said:

> At this stage he made his prophecy of the Crisis, with a reminder of his message given during the black weeks of September that there would be no war. 'We have returned from the spirit world to succeed and not to fail.'

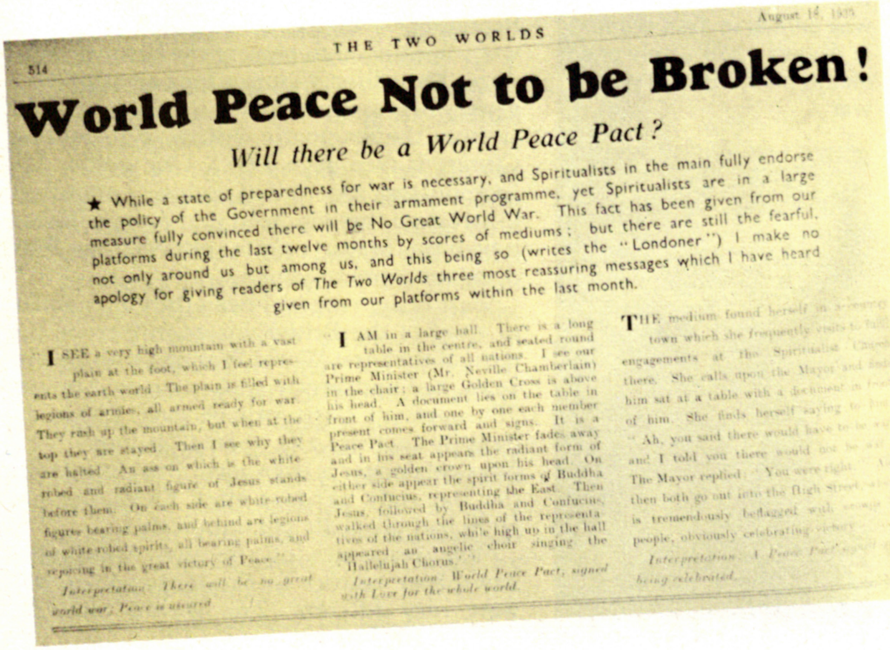
Spiritualists were adamant that there would be no war in 1939, for their spirit guides told them so. *Psychic News* of 19 March 1938 (below right) announced that the spirit guide White Hawk promised peace; the paper's editor Maurice Barbanell (above) supported the Spiritualists' claim at Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park. And *Two Worlds* of 18 August 1939 featured accounts of three statements made by entranced mediums that foretold peace (below)

### A message of peace

On 16 March Germany invaded Czechoslovakia. Less than a month later, on Good Friday, Italian troops invaded Albania. On 22 May 1939 Germany and Italy signed the 'Pact of Steel', and soon Japan was asked to join the alliance. Increasingly, the British public was convinced that appeasement was a failure and that war was inevitable. Nonetheless, the message of the certainty of peace was echoed by mediums all over the country, and *Psychic News* of 22 July carried this editorial comment:

> A reader takes us to task for admitting that spirit guides are not infallible. They declare that they are human, still, and are liable to error. At the same time, I am confident there is no possibility of error when the prophecy is so unanimous. From every well-known guide and from home circles all over the world there has come the assurance that never again will England be involved in war. While individual spirits are fallible when dealing with lesser issues, I refuse to believe in the possibility of a mistake in this particular instance.

On 24 July 1939 Britain, France and Russia signed a mutual assistance pact. About a month later, under the headline 'World Peace not to be Broken – will there be a World Peace Pact?', *Two Worlds* published the content of a number of prophetic spirit



514 THE TWO WORLDS August 18, 1939

# World Peace Not to be Broken!

*Will there be a World Peace Pact?*

★ While a state of preparedness for war is necessary, and Spiritualists in the main fully endorse the policy of the Government in their armament programme, yet Spiritualists are in a large measure fully convinced there will be No Great World War. This fact has been given from our platforms during the last twelve months by scores of mediums; but there are still the fearful, not only around us but among us, and this being so (writes the "Londoner") I make no apology for giving readers of *The Two Worlds* three most reassuring messages which I have heard given from our platforms within the last month.

"I SEE a very high mountain with a vast plain at the foot, which I feel represents the earth world. The plain is filled with legions of armies, all armed ready for war. They rush up the mountain, but when at the top they are stayed. Then I see why they are halted. An ass on which is the white-robed and radiant figure of Jesus stands before them. On each side are white-robed figures bearing palms, and behind are legions of white-robed spirits, all bearing palms, and rejoicing in the great victory of Peace."

*Interpretation: There will be no great world war; Peace is assured.*

"I AM in a large hall. There is a long table in the centre, and seated round are representatives of all nations. I see our Prime Minister (Mr. Neville Chamberlain) in the chair; a large Golden Cross is above his head. A document lies on the table in front of him, and one by one each member present comes forward and signs. It is a Peace Pact. The Prime Minister fades away and in his seat appears the radiant form of Jesus, a golden crown upon his head. On either side appear the spirit forms of Buddha and Confucius, representing the East. Then Jesus, followed by Buddha and Confucius, walked through the lines of the representatives of the nations, while high up in the hall appeared an angelic choir singing the 'Hallelujah Chorus.'"

*Interpretation: World Peace Pact, signed with Love for the whole world.*

THE medium found herself in [illegible] town which she frequently visits to fulfil engagements at the Spiritualist Church there. She calls upon the Mayor and finds him sat at a table with a document in front of him. She finds herself saying to him: "Ah, you said there would have to be war, and I told you there would not be war." The Mayor replied: "You were right." And then both go out into the High Street, which is tremendously beflagged with people, obviously celebrating victory.

*Interpretation: A Peace Pact signed ... being celebrated.*

Psychic News

THE SPIRITUALIST NEWSPAPER WITH THE WORLD'S LARGEST CIRCULATION

LIFE AFTER DEATH PROVED

No. 304 LONDON: MARCH 19, 1938 Price TWOPENCE

## NO WAR FOR ENGLAND! — A Spirit Prophecy

"Day Of Reckoning For The Dictators Is Not Far Away"

New Era Is Gradually Dawning For Humanity, Declares Silver Birch

Above: Red Cloud, the spirit guide of medium Estelle Roberts (left), declared: 'We have returned . . . to succeed and not to fail'

messages. One of these, regarded with the critical eye of the historian, seems absurd:

> I am in a large hall. There is a long table in the centre, and seated round are representatives of all nations. I see our Prime Minister (Mr Neville Chamberlain) in the chair; a large Golden Cross is above his head. A document lies on the table in front of him, and one by one each member present comes forward and signs. It is a peace pact. The Prime Minister fades away and in his seat appears the radiant form of Jesus, a golden crown upon his head. On either side appear the spirit forms of Buddha and Confucius, representing the East. Then Jesus, followed by Buddha and Confucius, walked through the lines of the representatives of the nations, while high up in the hall appears an angel choir singing the 'Hallelujah Chorus'. *Interpretation* World Peace Pact, signed with Love for the whole world.

In the 'Londoner' column of the same issue was flashed a news item:

> There will be no world war, said Lord Northcliffe to Londoner at a seance on Wednesday last. 'The efforts you are making on your side of life in getting yourselves into a state of preparedness have greatly helped us on this side. I re-state emphatically. THERE WILL BE NO GREAT WORLD WAR.'

On 23 August the foreign ministers of the Soviet Union and Germany shocked Western Europe by signing the Russo-German non-aggression pact. Two days later, *Two Worlds* had more to say on the message from Lord Northcliffe, who certainly had influenced events as ruler of a publishing empire when alive. His message had come through Bert, the spirit guide of a West Hampstead medium named Mrs Winifred Ellis, who had in turn passed it on to 'Londoner'. Lord Northcliffe had told Bert that, 'By your clean thoughts and the elimination of fear from them, coupled with the will to "be prepared", you will create an insurmountable bulwark against the enemy.'

Lord Northcliffe, head of a publishing empire and a man of great influence, allegedly spoke from beyond the grave to say 'There will be no world war.' This statement was printed in *Two Worlds* in August 1939 – only one month before Britain was at war

German troops went into Poland in the early hours of 1 September. The *Two Worlds* editorial of that date – obviously written some time before – comments that 'the thousands of messages which have come through the veil in the last few months have been almost unanimous in the opinion that despite the clouds in the sky, peace will be maintained.' And in the same paper, Frank T. Blake affirmed, 'Winter is coming. It will be a winter without war.'

### 'War does not come'

The lead story in *Psychic News* of 2 September – the day before Britain declared war – continued to present the peace prophecies. The editor, Maurice Barbanell, chose a variety of messages from spirit guides as well as from the automatic writing of Geraldine Cummins (see page 2218). One guide, Mr Jackson, was reported as saying, 'I am asked to stress all that has been said before. There is no need for fear, only for perfect calm. War does not come to your world.'

Earl Haig, who had been the commander in chief of the British forces in Europe for most of the First World War and who died in 1928, had apparently spoken on 23 August: 'The present crisis will be over within 14 days – that is, the mental danger. The physical danger is over now.' Britain entered the war only 12 days after Field Marshal Haig had allegedly communicated.

The responses of the two Spiritualist newspaper editors to the outbreak of war were very different. *Two Worlds* came up

with a variety of excuses: misinterpretation by mediums; poor communication; the prophecies had been made too public; the prophecies were a tactic devised by the spirit world to try to *secure* peace. And worse, it started publishing obscure prophecies of war that supposedly had been made before September. However, Maurice Barbanell of *Psychic News*, writing in the issue for 9 September 1939, admitted error:

> Even as recently as last weekend, after the Prime Minister's declaration that a 'state of war' existed, the spirit messages continued to affirm that peace would prevail at that late hour. . . . The belief in the spirit world's ability to forecast may have to be abandoned.

Since that time, *Psychic News* has adopted a policy of disclaiming any prophecy it might publish.

How much credence can be given to spirit guides as the source of the no-war prophecies? The independent existence of such guides has never been proved – which means that the prophecies could have come from the minds of the mediums. Even the brilliant psychic Eileen Garrett came to believe that her controls were from her own subconscious (see page 1998), and there is no clear-cut evidence of paranormal communication in the prophecy cases sited.

It is not impossible that human consciousness may survive bodily death. But it is a very different matter to claim that such a surviving consciousness can gain access to a source of knowledge about the future. That is a very far-reaching claim indeed. It is more probable that the whole spate of spiritualistic no-war prophecies were the product of natural and understandable wishful thinking, and the desire for peace.

British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain waving a copy of the 'no war' pact he signed with Hitler in 1938. His ill-founded optimism was perhaps of the same origin as the forecasts of the spirit prophets

## A striking omission

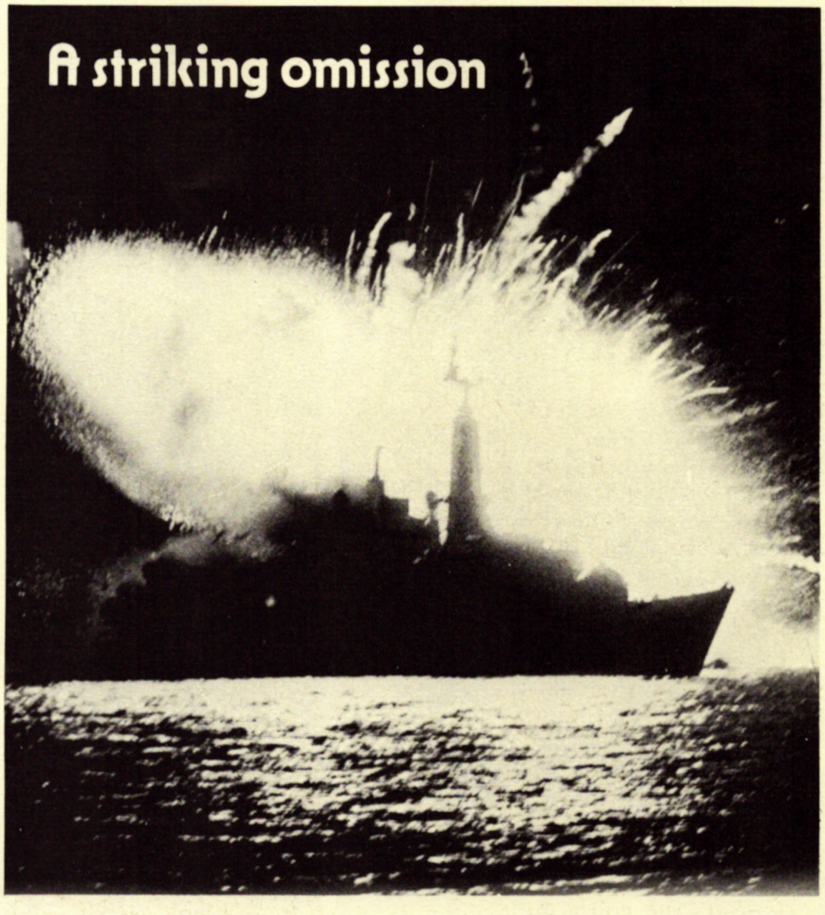
Between March and July 1979 a group of 15 forecasters were asked to predict what would happen to Britain – and the world – during the 1980s. The group included astrologers, mediums, clairvoyants and other psychics, and their glimpses into the future were collected together and published in *Future tense* (1980).

They warned about economic failures and social unrest, but held out the promise of a new age of peace and co-operation if a particularly dangerous crisis could be safely avoided in 1984. And they said that Britain would provide the world leadership for a 'great spiritual re-emergence'.

The group of prophets also foresaw the assassination of President Sadat of Egypt, which did take place, on 6 October 1981; but failed with their predicted assassination of the Shah of Iran, who died of natural causes in exile.

They anticipated a 'bloodbath' in Africa and a short sharp war in the Far East, with the surprising alignment of Japan with China against the USSR.

But there was at least one striking omission. No hint was given of a British-Argentine confrontation, let alone a bitter war over the Falkland Islands (right: HMS *Antelope* is destroyed by Argentine bombs).



# The gentle art of murder

**Some masters of the martial arts are said to possess the ability to commit the perfect murder, using a forbidden technique that is known only to a handful of initiates. MICHAEL GOSS reports on the claims that have accumulated around the delayed death touch**

George Dillman, an American karate teacher, smashes three ice blocks, each weighing 300 pounds (136 kilograms), with a single blow of his elbow. We are familiar with such well-publicised feats by masters of oriental martial arts – but is there also a secret art in which a covert 'blow', almost unnoticed by the victim and by third parties alike, can kill the victim after a long delay?

ANYONE WHO HAS SEEN A KARATE expert demolish piles of bricks, boards, tiles or concrete slabs with a single blow will testify to the lethal potential of a human body when it has undergone the right kind of training and conditioning. When a man such as George Dillman, an American master of karate, shatters simultaneously 10 ice blocks, each weighing 100 pounds (45 kilograms), stacked on top of each other, he leaves no doubt as to the reality of the feat: the splintered rubble that is left behind is proof enough.

But it is another matter to believe that some martial arts experts can cause internal injuries, unconsciousness and death by the briefest of pressures on certain apparently non-critical points of a victim's body – and that these effects can be deferred until hours, days or even months have passed. Yet this is exactly what has been alleged of the almost

legendary art of *dim mak*, the 'delayed death touch'.

It was in search of the truth behind stories of dim mak and other fabled unarmed combat systems that a Western martial arts expert, John F. Gilbey, roamed from continent to continent. He finally encountered the delayed death touch technique in Taiwan in 1957. There, with all the reluctance that is natural when closely guarded and dangerous knowledge is imparted to an outsider, a boxing master named Oh Hsin-yang gave him a demonstration. The human guinea-pig used in the experiment was his son, Ah Lin.

The blow was a light, seemingly harmless, touch delivered just below the victim's navel. For the three days following, Gilbey was able to keep Ah Lin under the closest surveillance. His health was seemingly unimpaired, his spirits were lively. The master did not come near his son until noon on the third day. He appeared just in time to revive him with herbal medicine and massage – for, as

Mourners crowd around the coffin at a Hong Kong funeral (below). Their grief is for the superstar Bruce Lee (bottom), the hero of numerous kung fu films. He probably died from a freak reaction to a tranquilliser – but many fans believed their hero had been killed by a delayed death touch from some unknown rival

Bottom right: Dr John 'Biff' Painter allegedly showing the reality of *ch'i* force: he 'applies it to the auric field' of his blindfolded colleague – and the man sways back, even though no physical contact has been made

Oh Hsin-yang had anticipated, his son had suddenly and unaccountably collapsed into unconsciousness.

When Ah Lin had recovered (though he faced three months' convalescence to get over his experience completely) Gilbey left Taiwan convinced that he was one of the very few Westerners who had been privileged to witness the delayed death touch in operation.

Despite Gilbey's own expert status, this evidence remains anecdotal, as do most accounts of dim mak. Until 1980 no work even remotely approaching Western laboratory standards was available and the only masters said to possess the skill refused to demonstrate it, even under the most informal conditions.

### Instrument of perfect murders

In consequence the delayed death touch remains the focus of wild fantasies: it is the supposed instrument of 'perfect murders', in which the victim dies of causes unknown, with symptoms suggesting severe, incomprehensible yet natural illness. In the East any unexpected death of a notable person can provoke rumours of a dim mak assassination. The untimely death of the martial arts superstar Bruce Lee in July 1973 had precisely this effect.

Stories of the delayed death touch occur all over south-eastern Asia, but particularly in China, where the skill reputedly reached a zenith during the T'ang Dynasty (AD 618–906). Although the term is applied somewhat loosely to a number of techniques, purists are careful to distinguish it from *tieh chang*, the iron palm (involving toughening of the hands), and from *tu wu shou*, the poison hand (involving the anointing of the hand with harmful substances). The true delayed death touch is not a ferocious movement like a karate 'chop', or one of the whiplash punches found in many styles of kung fu: it is more like a short-distance prod with, apparently, not enough force behind it to leave so much as a bruise.

Students of the 'forbidden art' must remember that a victim's vulnerability fluctuates according to the temperature and hour of the day. This is consistent with an Eastern tradition that the circulation of the blood through the body varies hourly. A Western karate master, Alan Lee, states that the circulation passes via 36 major, 72 minor and 108 subsidiary 'blood gates', and that the expert, knowing both their location and the times when the flow of blood through each is at its maximum, can use light pressure on a strategic point to cause a fatal disruption of the flow – by, for example, a blood clot. Such knowledge took years to acquire; once they were in possession of it, masters could reduce their own susceptibility to attack by regulating the pulse at crucial times.

According to Dr John 'Biff' Painter, an American master, the Chinese martial art technique of *duann mie*, a blow directed

against veins or muscles, can cause the wasting and death of important organs by an interruption of the blood supply to them. At first the victim suffers only minor discomfort, but later succumbs as the affected organ is starved of its blood supply.

But some writers attribute the efficacy of the true death touch to its interference with the mysterious 'intrinsic' or 'internal' energy of the human body, *ch'i*. This energy – *ch'i* in Chinese, *ki* in Japanese – is fundamental to a number of oriental disciplines of healing and of combat that Western researchers have viewed with increasing interest since about 1960. Acupuncture (see page 181) is a notable example. The energy is thought to pervade the human body, circulating in a 24-hour cycle along channels called meridians and feeding the organs. Although it is never entirely absent from each channel, it is subject to a kind of tidal effect, approaching and receding from them according to the hour of the day. Oriental therapists regard illness as imbalance or blockage of *ch'i* and seek by use of needles or by manipulations to restore the overall harmony.

The ability to control *ch'i* and to generate extra surges of it is alleged to enable martial artists to perform feats well beyond their normal ability, and many styles of fighting feature, during their more advanced stages, exercises designed to stimulate the flow of *ch'i*.

The martial arts student may also be taught the 708 points on the meridians to which pressure can be applied to enhance or retard *ch'i*, allegedly preventing it from feeding the vital organs. The result of such an attack would again be a kind of starvation – but of energy rather than blood. Unconsciousness and eventually death would ensue, without any physical clue to connect the antagonist with the damage.

### Disrupting the energy flow

John Painter puts the odds against an untrained attacker successfully making a lethal dim mak strike by pure chance at 10,000 to one. It is not enough merely to know the right points to strike, to gauge the right moment from knowledge of the timetable governing the *ch'i* circulation and to hit the target with unerring accuracy – taking into account such factors as the body temperature and muscular build of the victim. The attacker must then, according to the theory, be able to generate the requisite amount of internal energy. He must disrupt the victim's *ch'i* flow by transferring a certain 'voltage' of his own *ch'i* through his fingers at the moment of the strike.

Painter estimates that if the discharge of *ch'i* is 'light', the victim's end may be deferred by up to two weeks. A heavy blow might kill him in as little as 12 to 24 hours. Light-to-moderate attacks create a partial blockage of the meridians, augmented each time the *ch'i* reaches the affected point on its diurnal circulation, until the meridian comes to resemble a choked water pipe. The process can be reversed only by the ministrations of someone with a superior knowledge of Chinese medicine, such as a skilled acupuncturist. However, Dr Painter regards some dim mak strikes as incurable: the victim 'should begin his funeral preparations', he grimly advises.

Many people in the East have a deeply rooted belief in the existence of the death touch. Could such a person be killed by the mere suggestion that the touch he had just received would be fatal?

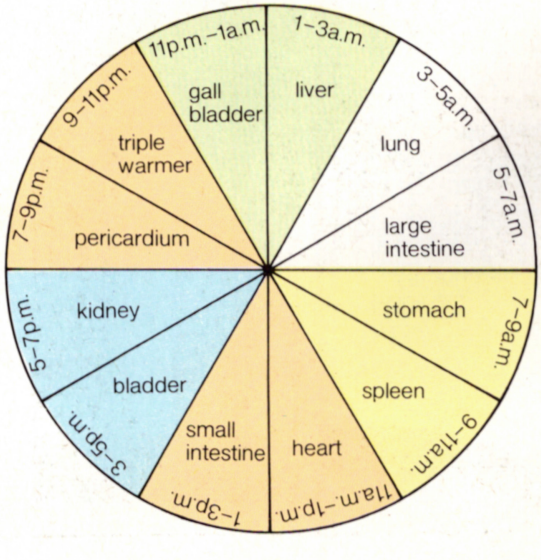
The victim's belief in the efficacy of dim mak certainly figured strongly in a strange story carried in English newspapers on 17 February 1976. During a brawl aboard the Royal Fleet Auxiliary *Empire Gull*, anchored at Marchwood, Hampshire, a Chinese cook, aged 48, stabbed to death an elderly compatriot who had hit him. His statement to the police suggested that he believed the blow had been imbued with more than physical force – that it was a delayed death touch. He remarked: 'He died first and I will die later.' And indeed he was suffering from a mysterious, undiagnosable illness that is said to have baffled three doctors. Was the illness due to his own evident conviction that the blow was to prove lethal?

But there are several reliable modern accounts of martial arts experts selectively breaking one brick or tile in a stack of several, leaving those above and below unharmed. Such feats make it more credible that a blow could be delivered to a human body and cause internal injury without leaving any external marks – but there can be no question of bricks and tiles being influenced by suggestion.

But just what evidence is there that the delayed death touch is more than a comic book fantasy?

John Painter gave a demonstration during a lecture on acupressure in November 1980 that goes some way towards conforming with scientific requirements. The experiment was

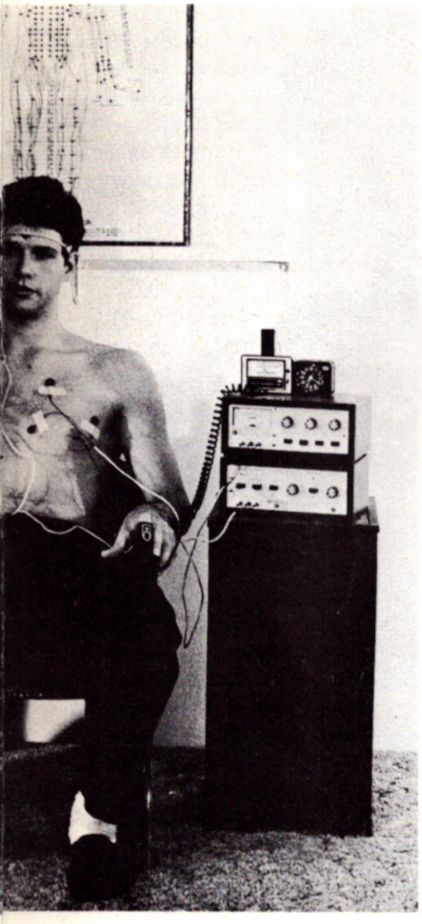
Above: the delayed death touch in action? Dr Painter is shown administering a mild blow, too gentle to be painful, to a volunteer. The symptoms that followed included rising temperature, fluctuating pulse rate, profuse sweating and trembling. Dr Painter claims that 'severe damage' would have occurred had he not taken remedial action




Left: the Chinese 'body clock': in each organ the *ch'i* flow is strongest at particular times. (The 'triple warmer' supposedly controls the harmony of the system)

**Further reading**

Glen Barclay, *Mind over matter*, Pan 1975
John F. Gilbey, *The secret fighting arts of the world*, Pan 1974
Wu Len Chang, *The forbidden technique of dim mak*, Strand Book Co. (Ipoh, Malaysia)



electronically monitored and carried out before an audience that included medically qualified witnesses. The event was striking – in more ways than one.

A healthy volunteer was connected to equipment monitoring his pulse rate, temperature, blood pressure and other physiological factors. He was not informed the exact nature of the experiment, only that it was intended to display a 'special type of acupressure'. After the initial readings had been taken Painter applied a moderate strike to a point called *hui kui hsueh* in the chest. The subject reported no pain but said that his body felt numb and his right arm heavy.

During the next half hour he experienced a variety of unusual symptoms as, according to Dr Painter's thesis, the *ch'i* flow began to pass through the site of the strike. Within 10 minutes he was suffering abdominal discomfort; within another five minutes his body temperature had climbed from 98.6°F (37°C) to 100°F (37.8°C). After 20 minutes the pulse rate – which had been 62 beats per minute at the start of the test – was fluctuating wildly from less than 50 to more than 160. The subject suffered constriction of the chest muscles, profuse perspiration and trembling of the limbs. His blood pressure soared. When Dr Painter judged that it was approaching a dangerous level he ended the experiment by massaging the site of blockage and administering a herbal medicine. One hour later the subject was back to normal. The onlookers accepted that, left unchecked, the dim mak process would have resulted in severe damage to the human guinea-pig; Dr Painter himself believed the man would have died within two days.

Sceptics might object that the trial did not wholly exclude the possibility of the subject's expectations or the experimenter's suggestions playing a part. But the symptoms recorded seem too extreme to be accounted for solely in those terms. That a person's pulse should race because of suggestion or excitement is highly probable; that it should vary between 50 and 160 from those causes alone is less probable. Still, one isolated experiment will not satisfy Westerners that the delayed death touch truly exists; it would be preferable to study a number of dim mak masters demonstrating their skills in a laboratory. But such persons are rarely encountered and when they are identified they habitually refuse to impart their learning to others. Painter concludes:

> Such power in the hands of the unenlightened is like a chimpanzee with a bazooka. Such power corrupts and distorts reality. It is for this reason that those who possess the full power in such arts refuse to speak of it, and why many of the wise ones regret acquisition of such knowledge and have carried their arts . . . to their graves.

## Feeling the full force

The karate expert C. W. Nicol wrote an account of his martial arts training in Japan in which he relates an almost incredible incident bearing on the delayed death touch. His master was a sixth-dan black belt, Hirokazu Kanazawa (right). One day, when with a few students, he placed three bricks on the floor and broke them with a single blow. But that, he said, was nothing. He put down another pile of three bricks. He determined to put his *ki* (the Japanese term for *ch'i*) into the middle brick. With a shout he brought his fist down on the pile – and only the middle brick cracked. This was in accord with the belief of many martial artists that 'mind-force could project itself further and deeper than the actual physical presence of the fist, and could of itself alone alter the state of matter.'

This is certainly the belief of Dr John Painter, who runs a martial arts institute in Arlington, Virginia, USA. He believes that every human being possesses an aura consisting of *ch'i*, and that through certain forms of mental control, such as meditation, it is possible to increase the 'vibratory rate' of the aura. The 'vibrations' can be increased to a point where they are disruptive of any other living matter that comes within a certain radius of influence – up to 12 feet (3.6 metres). The power of this control of *ch'i* can also be demonstrated on a candle flame (far left). Dr Painter explains that it took 10 minutes to extinguish this flame. He believes that beyond the delayed death touch, *dim mak*, there exists a higher art – that of killing from a distance, without the need even to touch the victim. However, there is no need to fear this skill: a condition of acquiring it is to 'clear the mind of all sensual and egotistical desires . . . like a beautiful flower, it must be nurtured and cultivated. . . .' So this fearful power is possessed only by those who are beyond all desire to do harm.

# The greatest medium of all?

**The phenomena produced by the 19th-century physical medium Daniel Dunglas Home suggested to one contemporary anthropologist that Home was a kind of latter-day shaman. BRIAN INGLIS assesses this idea**

Right: a bronze bust of Daniel Dunglas Home, perhaps the most gifted – and controversial – of all the Victorian physical mediums. Home was allegedly able to produce a wide range of paranormal phenomena – including psychokinetic effects, the ability to endure prolonged contact with fire, and the remarkable capacity to elongate parts of the body at will. It was pointed out by the 19th-century anthropologist E. B. Tylor that all these talents are frequently attributed to witch doctors and shamans (below left: a 16th-century illustration of a North American Indian shaman)

IF THE PARANORMAL FEATS attributed to the medium Daniel Dunglas Home (see page 2390) were genuine, then they immediately raise questions about the true potential of Man and his interaction with others. For, more than any other 19th-century medium, D. D. Home furnished the most remarkable proof of bizarre abilities – such as bodily elongation, psychokinesis and incombustibility. 'Impossible' though they sound, these phenomena were so well-attested by impeccable witnesses that surely only the most hidebound sceptic would refuse to consider what their implications might be, for science and for society.

One such phenomenon was touched upon by E. B. Tylor, later to become the first professor of anthropology at the University of Oxford, in his *Primitive culture* (1871). He was struck by the similarities between the phenomena that Home and other mediums were producing, and those that were being reported by travellers and missionaries as occurring among 'savages' (as people of primitive cultures were then described). This, Tylor thought, raised the issue:

> Do the Red Indian Medicine Man, the Tartar necromancer, the Highland ghost-seer, and the Boston medium share the possession of a belief and knowledge of the highest truth and import which, nevertheless, the great intellectual movement of the last two centuries has simply thrown aside as worthless?

All over the world, wherever tribal communities were studied, the same kind of phenomena as those witnessed by sitters at Spiritualist seances were being reported, ranging from simple second sight to bodily levitations. Tylor could not believe it; but he had to admit that what scientists had regarded as bringing enlightenment, through the purging of old superstitions, just possibly might have entailed the *loss* of important faculties. If so, Tylor concluded, the savages who had been dismissed as degenerate may 'turn on their accusers and charge them with having fallen from the high level of savage knowledge'.

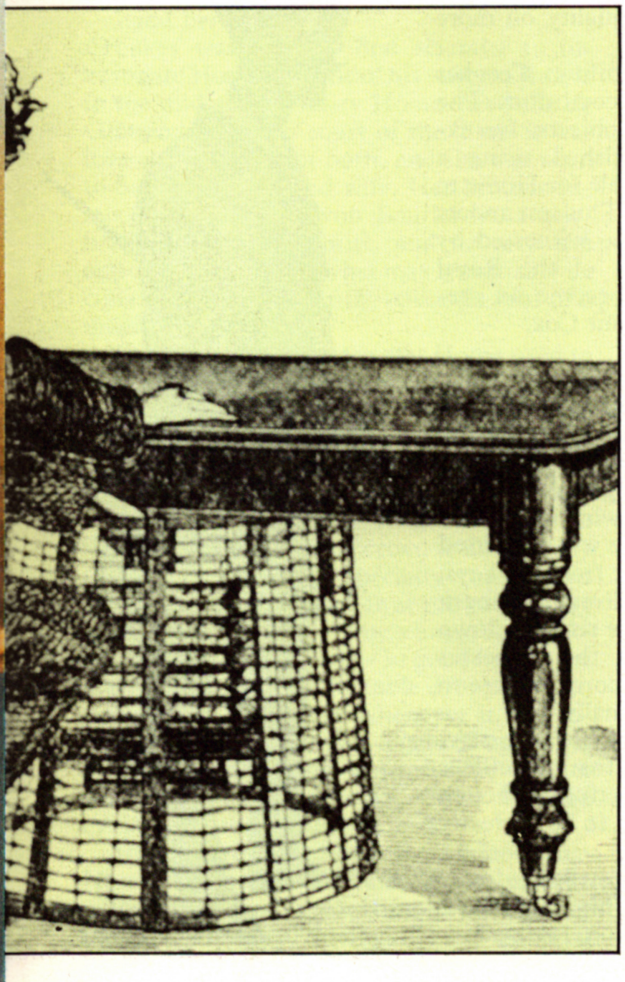
Home's career appeared repeatedly to demonstrate that he had somehow rediscovered the ancient abilities that shamans and witch doctors possessed, such as 'incombustibility' – the capacity to resist the effects of fire. 'Firewalking' had often been reported

by travellers (see page 301): the shaman, followed by members of the tribe, would walk unscathed across white-hot stones or glowing ashes.

But Home's feats were even more remarkable. When the eminent Victorian scientist William Crookes invited him to be the subject of a series of experiments, Home began by showing how he could influence a spring balance from a distance, and then went on literally to play with fire. He stirred the burning coals in the grate with his hand; then, taking up a red-hot piece of coal 'nearly as big as an orange', and covering it with his other hand, he blew on it until it was nearly white hot.

On a less alarming level, Home used to hold a finger in a candle flame to demonstrate that it would not scorch as long as he remained in his entranced state. Significantly, this was one of the tricks of the stage hypnotists' trade at the time. Volunteers from the audience would be called for; those who were susceptible to hypnotism would be put into a trance and made to behave in eccentric ways for the general amusement. But these shows raised some serious points – and the protection that hypnosis could give from both burns and the accompanying pain was one of them.

Later, when hypnotism was recognised by the academic world as a reality – instead of an occult superstition, traded upon by rogues – psychologists found that a degree of incombustibility could be provided, so long as a deep enough trance state was entered into by the subject. So Tylor's 'savages' *had* possessed knowledge of great importance, which had been brushed aside as so much 'mumbo-jumbo'.



Above: Sir William Crookes (1832–1919). This eminent scientist conducted five years of research into the alleged powers of mediums – many of them with D. D. Home, whom he both admired and trusted. In one celebrated experiment, Crookes tested Home to see whether he could play an accordion (above right) through psychokinesis. The accordion was placed in a copper cage (left), and Home was allowed to rest his hand on the end furthest from the keys. The instrument soon began to play – and continued even when Home removed his hand from it

Home also demonstrated a range of phenomena that tied in with miracles reported in connection with the lives of saints. As the young Lord Adare reported after a seance in 1867: 'Standing there beside me, Home grew, I should say, at least six inches [15 centimetres].' 'Elongations' of this kind were quite often reported by witnesses at Home's seances – just as they had been commonly reported of holy men in their trance states throughout history.

On another occasion Adare's friends Charles Wynne and the Master of Lindsay – Lindsay, a notable scientist, was soon to be made a fellow of the Royal Society – saw tongues of flame projecting from Home's head: 'we all then distinctly heard, as it were, a bird flying round the room, whistling and chirping,' Adare noted. 'There then came the sound of a great wind rushing through the room; we also felt the wind strongly.' In his trance, Home spoke to them in a language they did not understand (see page 444), before explaining that the manifestations had been designed to show them, as it were, a repeat performance of the phenomena associated with the first Pentecost (when the

Left: *St Francis and St Andrew*, by El Greco (1541–1614). Both saints show the curious phenomenon of bodily elongation often reported in legends of holy men – and in shamans and witch doctors. D. D. Home, too, was able to produce the phenomenon; as Lord Adare (below) reported in 1867, 'Standing there beside me, Home grew, I should say, at least six inches [15 centimetres]'

Holy Spirit entered the Apostles in the form of tongues of flame).

At the time of Home's greatest fame, not only had paranormal phenomena of all kinds been rejected by orthodox scientists, but the miracles recorded of the saints had been singled out for particular derision. It was assumed they were the product of fallacious memory coupled with superstitious awe, worked upon craftily by the clergy or the monks who would benefit if their nominee were canonised; for then, their church or monastery would become a shrine.

Home's career, therefore, provided a link between the reports of phenomena witnessed by explorers and anthropologists, and the descriptions of the feats of the saints. And aspects of his career also accorded with the reports of the early mesmerists – some of whom had subjects who, in their trance states, had developed psychic powers. And, again, other aspects tied in with the reports of poltergeist cases, which presented many similar features – including 'apports', objects that materialised out of nowhere, sometimes to dematerialise again, only to reappear in some other part of the house.

It is worth recalling the astonishing range of phenomena that Crookes encountered in his five years of research with mediums – most of them with Home, whom he admired and trusted. Crookes listed:

Movement of heavy bodies with contact, but without physical pressure.
Currents of air.
Changes of temperature [these were not subjective: they registered on a thermometer].
Percussive noises – sometimes raps, but sometimes faint scratchings, sometimes detonations.
Alteration in the weight of objects.
Movements of furniture with no contact.
Levitation of furniture with no contact.
Levitation of Home himself.
Movements of articles at a distance.
Tunes on musical instruments which nobody was playing.
Luminescences.
Materialisations – in Home's case, often of hands ['I have retained one of these hands in my own,' Crookes recalled, 'firmly resolved not to let it escape. There was no struggle or effort made to get loose, but it gradually seemed to resolve itself into vapour, and faded in that manner from my grasp.']
'Direct writing' – hands, visible or invisible, taking up pens to write messages.
Phantoms.
Demonstrations of intelligence that could not be attributed to the medium: the provision of information, say, about relations of sitters who were no longer alive, and whom Home had never known.
Translocations – 'apports'.

Curiously, Crookes forgot to include incombustibility in his list, although he had witnessed Home exhibit this quality on more than one occasion.

Some of these strange abilities Crookes had witnessed in formal trial conditions. The alteration of the weight of objects, for example, had been accomplished using a gadget that made it impossible for Home to exert any physical pressure. This test and its successful outcome were also witnessed by William Huggins, a fellow of the Royal Society (who was later to become its president), and a lawyer, Serjeant Cox.

### Remote music

Crookes designed another test specifically to find if Home could play an accordion by psychic force in circumstances that ruled out any possibility of his touching it. A cage was made, insulated with copper wire, into which the accordion was put. Home was permitted to hold it by the end furthest from the keys; and as it was possible to see through the mesh of the cage, he could not have reached down to touch the keys without the witnesses catching him do it. If the accordion were to play, it would play paranormally.

Even so, the accordion soon began to play; Crookes's assistant reported that its bellows were expanding and contracting, although Home's hands could be seen to be perfectly still. Crookes said:

The sequel was still more striking, for Mr Home then removed his hand altogether from the accordion, taking it

Left: the well-known stage magician John N. Maskelyne in action. Maskelyne toured the country with an act in which he duplicated some of the phenomena produced by D.D. Home in the seance room; according to those who had seen both Maskelyne's act and the original phenomena, however, the magician's performance was no more than a travesty

Below: a cast of D. D. Home's hand, preserved at the Society for Psychical Research in London. Home was often able to produce materialisations of hands in seance conditions. Crookes, who held one of these hands in his own, said it seemed solid enough at first, but 'gradually seemed to resolve itself into vapour, and faded in that manner from my grasp'

> [his hand] quite out of the cage, and placed it in the hand of the person next to him. The instrument then continued to play, no person touching it, and no hand being near it.

Crookes was not the first scientist to investigate Home. On one of his visits to Russia in the mid 19th century Home met Julie de Gloumeline at the court of the Tsar; it was love at first sight for both, and she was soon to become his second wife. Her brother-in-law was Alexander von Boutlerow, a celebrated Russian scientist, and he took the opportunity to make what may reasonably be considered the first truly scientific trial of a medium.

One of the little games that Home used to play with sitters was to ask them to try to move a table when they had ordered it *not* to move: their united efforts would fail to cause it to budge – though seconds later, when they told the table it could float, they found they could lift it with ease. Might this be an illusion? Boutlerow proceeded to find out, by the ingenious use of specially constructed scales; the table weighed in at 100 pounds (45 kilograms), but with Home's fingertips lightly touching the tabletop – in good light – the scales recorded that the table dropped to 30 pounds (14 kilograms) whenever it was instructed to be 'light'; and a gain of up to 150 pounds (68 kilograms) was recorded when it was instructed to be 'heavy'. Such objective evidence is remarkable indeed.

In almost every respect the evidence that Home demonstrated remarkable psychic powers is clear. If the testimony of scores of men and women of intelligence and standing counts for anything, we must accept that he performed the feats they described and performed them week after week, year after year. Nobody has even attempted to show how they could have been done by sleight of hand – or, as Home did them, in good light, unfamiliar surroundings and unaided.

The famous stage magician Maskelyne toured with a 'D. D. Home act'; but according to Thomas Augustus Trollope – in those days better known as an author than his brother Anthony – it was a travesty. Trollope had not liked Home when he had met him as a young man, but he had never doubted that his feats were genuine. Maskelyne's, he insisted, bore no resemblance to them.

Could Home have in some mysterious way hypnotised his sitters, thus providing them with the illusion of levitation and all the rest of his extraordinary phenomena? This was often suggested, no doubt in desperation, by people who did not want to accept him as a genuine psychic, but who realised that the charge of conjuring could not be made to stick. In fact there is no hard evidence that this type of group illusion is practicable.

But hard-line sceptics still maintain that what Home allegedly did was contrary to the laws of nature, and therefore impossible. However, what scientists once regarded as laws have since proved to be mutable; at the atomic level they are endlessly being broken (see page 801).

We do not know what the psychic forces are, or how and why they should operate through a medium such as Daniel Dunglas Home. But the evidence is surely far too strong for their reality – and for their potential significance – to allow the timidity of academics or the rancour of sceptics to block research in this area any longer.

**Further reading**

D. D. Home, *Incidents in my life*, Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, 1863
Brian Inglis, *Natural and supernatural*, Abacus 1979
Elizabeth Jenkins, *The shadow and the light*, Hamish Hamilton 1982

# As round as saucers

**Mysterious circles in isolated fields, with flattened surfaces that look as though something heavy had made the depression . . . can these really be UFO 'nests' – the traces of an alien landing – as many believe? IAN MRZYGLOD investigates**

AS THE SPACE PROGRAMMES have revealed more and more about our Universe, hopes have faded that our neighbouring planets are inhabited. As a result, the theory that intelligent beings from other planets are visiting Earth in UFOs has been largely destroyed – and the very premise that UFOs have a physical existence is threatened. Is it any wonder, then, that supporters of the extra-terrestrial hypothesis for the origin of UFOs look up in interest when there is a discovery of a circle of flattened grass or crops in the middle of a field, with no easy or apparent explanation to hand?

Such physical ground traces of alleged UFOs have been reported all over the world. Called UFO 'nests', they take the form of a circular indentation or depression in the ground with a spiral effect left on the flattened surface. A typical 'nest' was discovered in 1966, in swampland at Tully, Queensland, Australia. The reeds, which had been swirled clockwise, looked 'as if they had been subjected to some terrific rotary force'. On a farm near Garrison, Iowa, USA, in 1969, an alleged UFO hovering over a soya bean field left a large circular area of seared plants. And in Pretoria, South Africa, in 1965 the traces took more dramatic form. After two police officers were involved in a close encounter with a UFO that they said had landed on the road in front of them, they found a 6-foot (2-metre) circular area of the macadam road burned, with part of it caved in.

Top: the curious circle at Cley Hill, near Warminster in Wiltshire, which was discovered in the summer of 1982, and another ring in an adjacent field (above), found at about the same time. According to many UFO enthusiasts, such circles are evidence of UFO landings; meteorologists, however, offer a different, more earthly explanation

In the summer of 1980 three large circles of flattened corn were discovered by farmers at Westbury in Wiltshire, England. These rings were within a few hundred yards of each other, although they appeared at different times over a period of roughly 10 weeks. They were all found at the foot of the Westbury White Horse, an old hill figure cut into a very steep incline. It seemed significant that Westbury is only a short distance from Warminster, one of Britain's most famous centres of UFO phenomena (see page 1627).

The British UFO investigation organisation PROBE decided to look into the Westbury circles and visited the site in August 1980. Unfortunately, according to the farm

owner, the first of the three rings had been harvested and all traces of it were gone. But the other two yielded vital information.

Both rings were huge in diameter, one measuring about 60 feet (18 metres) across and the other slightly smaller. The corn in each ring was flattened in a clockwise spiral to a depth of 3 inches (7 centimetres), but the corn at the perimeters still stood $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet (105 centimetres) high. The apparent centres of the circles – that is, where the spirals seemed to originate – were not at the true centres of the flattened areas.

The corn stalks themselves, although bent at ground level, were otherwise undamaged, giving the impression that they had somehow been bent by a great force of air pressure rather than by direct contact with a solid object. No scorch marks were present, and there were no odours, marks, stains or residue. The flattened corn was not discoloured and, except for being bent, was in the same condition as the untouched corn. No tracks led to or from the circles.

PROBE took samples of the soil and corn to Bristol University for testing, including spectroscopic analyses and radioactivity tests, but all of these proved negative. There was no radiation present in the samples. They contained no deposits other than those expected in farmland soil treated chemically.

Below: one of the three circles at Westbury in Wiltshire, found in the summer of 1980. Members of the Bristol-based UFO research group PROBE were swiftly on the scene

Bottom: the three 'mystery' rings at Cheesefoot Head in Hampshire, which appeared in the summer of 1981

The investigators could find no immediate solution, but other people had ready answers. One hypothesis was that a helicopter had hovered over the fields so low that its downdraught had flattened the corn. This, however, had to be ruled out: a helicopter's downdraught would flatten the corn in a tapering effect, not a spiral. The favourite theory was that the circles were UFO 'nests'.

In the summer of 1981, while the mystery at Westbury Hill remained unsolved, more 'nests' appeared. The location this time was Cheesefoot Head, just east of Winchester in Hampshire. There were three circles in an approximate north-west to south-east direction. They seemed identical to those at Westbury, with features including a sharp cut-off at their perimeters and corn flattened in clockwise spirals. They were also at the base of a hill. However, these circles were different in that there was one large one between two smaller ones, which were less than half its size. This large ring measured nearly 62 feet (19 metres) across, which put it in the same category as the Westbury circles.

During the year between the discovery of the Westbury and Cheesefoot Head circles, a theory was being worked on by the Tornado and Storm Research Organisation at Trowbridge in Wiltshire. Their idea was that the circles had been caused by fair-weather whirlwinds. Those who argued against this pointed out that, while it is known that whirlwinds have damaged large areas of crops on many occasions, such damage has always resulted in the crops being scattered about the fields in a random fashion. In the cases of Westbury and Cheesefoot Head, the damage was precise and restricted in area. It was thought inconceivable that a fair-weather whirlwind could cut a neat circle in the corn or that it would dissipate without wandering in the direction of the prevailing winds, as is its habit, which would scatter the crops.

Whirlwinds may start when a layer of fast-moving cool air traps a layer of moist, warm air beneath it, creating an imbalance. The warm air then rushes upwards at great speed, and air flowing in from the sides gives the updraughts a twist. This twist sets the vortex spinning and the whirlwind results. Whirlwinds are more likely to occur in a wind shear – that is, when there is a difference in wind speed over a small area with, for example, a light wind on the surface and a strong one higher up. This shear creates the turbulence that can sometimes trigger the spin in the vortex and produce the whirlwind. The wind shear itself is created at the boundary between advancing air masses and pre-existing air masses with different wind directions, humidity and temperature.

A whirlwind can last from a few seconds to a few minutes and can wreak havoc during this short span of time. Sizes vary greatly from about 3 feet (1 metre) to over 65 feet (20 metres). In open land, whirlwinds tend to travel either where the advancing wind takes

them or along the boundary of the two air masses. The damage they do is characterised by trenches and untidy strewing of flattened crops, bearing no resemblance to a circle.

So how could the whirlwind theory apply to the 'mystery circles'?

Both sets of circles were located beneath steep hillsides with a concave shape, and this vital factor makes the theory plausible. Imagine that the retreating air mass is backed up against the hillside so that the advancing front is temporarily halted. Any whirlwind born at this moment will have to spend its force in this one place.

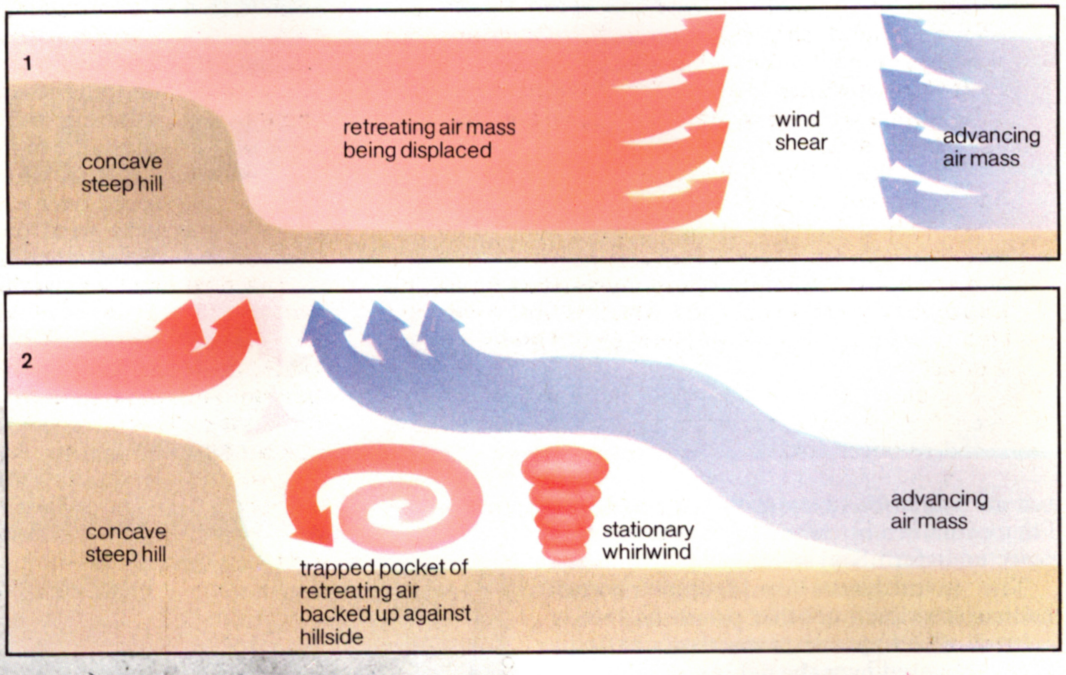
### Triple whirlwinds

In the case of the Westbury circles, this theory would easily explain the appearance of three separate circles over the summer months of 1980, there having been many days that offered suitable weather conditions for whirlwinds. The Cheesefoot Head circles are more difficult to explain because they seemed so symmetrical: they were more or less equidistant from each other and their centres were aligned. But this can be accounted for if we infer that, after the first whirlwind died, the frontal boundary advanced further before another whirlwind was born, and that this process was repeated once again, forming the three circles in a row.

It is not surprising that some have attacked this theory, pointing out that it takes coincidence too far. However, after the publication of the fair-weather whirlwind theory in *The PROBE Report* in late 1981, readers were asked to watch out for any mystery circles during the summer of 1982. And in August 1982 another one was discovered, at the base of Cley Hill 2 miles (4 kilometres) west of Warminster. Again PROBE investigators surveyed the area. The circle had been harvested, but was still clearly visible – and the investigators found another ring in an adjacent field. This second circle was sharply defined and measured approximately 50 feet (15 metres) in diameter. The close proximity of the circles to the steep face of Cley Hill gives strong support to the theory that the topography created the conditions for fixed whirlwinds, which made these new circles.

Discussions with the farmers engaged in harvesting at the time the circles appeared revealed that there had been four more circles carved out of the corn in the surrounding fields, although one of these was more oval in shape.

The fair-weather whirlwind hypothesis does not, of course, explain every alleged UFO 'nest' that has been reported, but it does serve to explain the 'mystery circles' that have so excited England's West Country. In Australia, too, many UFO 'nests' have been unearthed and it is interesting that the type of ring that has perplexed the Australian researchers the most is of the 'swirled and depressed crop' variety – like the Westbury, Cheesefoot Head and Cley Hill rings. Will investigators discover that fair-weather whirlwinds occur where alleged UFO 'nests' appear. Can it be that the whirlwind theory is the final answer to the UFO 'nest' enigma?




Below right: how a stationary whirlwind might be born. In 1, a retreating air mass is displaced by an advancing one. A whirlwind may form if conditions of speed, temperature and humidity are right. Such a whirlwind would ordinarily be carried along by the advancing air. In 2, however, a stationary pocket of air is formed, trapped by the hillside. The newly produced whirlwind can be trapped here and, circling in one spot with great force, could easily form a circular depression in the ground – and this is the new explanation offered for the Westbury, Cheesefoot Head and Cley Hill 'mystery' circles

Below: a fair-weather whirlwind photographed in Essex in 1976

# Post script

**Your letters to THE UNEXPLAINED**

Dear Sir,
I was most interested in your recent series of articles about megalithic sites as I myself have had a number of strange experiences concerning ancient monuments. The following incident occurred near Avebury in Wiltshire in June 1978.

A friend and I were camping near Avebury, on a tree-ringed barrow that had been 'home' to us for several weekends. It was a beautiful evening, warm and cloudless; we lit a small fire and sat talking for a while before settling down in our sleeping bags.

At some time during the night I suddenly awoke. I had the distinct feeling that I was being watched, but my friend was sound asleep. The barrow was bathed in moonlight, and I could see the standing stone on its crest quite clearly. Standing by the stone was a man; it was not a shadowy figure, but solid-looking flesh and blood. He appeared to be in his early twenties; he had shoulder length fair hair, was wearing banded skin leggings and a fur cloak, and at his side he wore a sword. I was, I admit, more than a little afraid, but when our eyes met the man seemed to be as surprised to see me as I was to see him! He turned and stepped out of sight. At this point I pinched myself to make sure I was awake; my friend was still fast asleep – I did not wake him, but tried once more to get to sleep myself.

Some time later I was awoken again; this time it was my friend shaking me by the shoulders and shouting at me. I asked what was wrong, whereupon he looked upwards towards the standing stone and said that he was sorry, nothing was wrong, he must have been dreaming.

We awoke a little after 5 a.m. and watched the Sun rise over the hills. I asked my friend what had troubled him during the night, and he related almost exactly the same experience as my own. When I told him about my 'sighting' of the mysterious figure, he was amazed. We do not know who this figure was, but I felt a lasting empathy with him. Could he have been a ghost?

I should be very interested to learn of similar experiences that other people have had, particularly in the Avebury area.
Yours faithfully,
*G. A. C. Meaby* Stevenage, Hertfordshire

Dear Sir,
Your article on Emily Sagée [issue 106] prompted me to write to you, as I believe that 'fetches' are very real. In fact, I recently saw my wife's 'fetch', and it caused a blazing row!

My wife had gone upstairs to get the children ready to go out, but about three minutes later she came downstairs in a hurry, went outside, came back in and dashed up the stairs again. I called out asking if she had forgotten something, but she made no reply. About five minutes later I went upstairs and asked if she had found whatever it was she had been looking for. She said she had not been downstairs, and was somewhat indignant when I insisted that she had. Later we agreed that I must have seen her fetch.

I have also had news of my own fetch. While in a large London hospital I was visited by the social worker; she said I had been to her office and asked to see her. In fact, I didn't even know where her office was. It could not have been a case of mistaken identity as I am a very 'conspicuous' person, even in a hospital, and the social worker had seen me twice before.

However, I had been thinking of my social worker at home and was about to write to her when this incident took place.

I find the whole subject of the nature of time fascinating. If time and space are 'elastic', then we are left with the intriguing possibility that people may be able to reincarnate into a *past* age, and this could, perhaps, account for such things as premonition and precognition, as well as for 'timeslips' into the future.

And wouldn't it be astonishing if all presently unexplained mysteries – such as the statues of Easter Island and the megaliths at Stonehenge [see page 826] – were somehow discovered to be the work of what, to us, is the *future*? The mind, whatever *that* is, boggles.
Yours faithfully,
*D. J. Hills* Haywards Heath, West Sussex

Dear Sir,
I should like to tell you about the mysterious object I saw one or two years ago. It was about midnight, and I was drawing my bedroom curtains before getting into bed when, to my amazement, I saw a ball of light through the window. It was very windy outside, so I couldn't detect any noise coming from the object, which was flashing on and off all the time. At first I thought it might be an aeroplane, but it was travelling very slowly, and I couldn't see wings or fuselage.

The object was heading towards a school and a wood opposite my house. It passed slowly over the school then started to turn back. Finally the object flew over a house – whereupon it vanished.

The next day I was waiting at the bus stop when I overheard a woman talking about a strange object she had seen the night before. I interrupted, saying that I had seen it too, just after midnight. She was sure that her sighting had been much earlier. Apparently, the light ball went over her house and 'nearly blew the windows in'.

I was rather reassured that someone else had witnessed this strange incident: at least I wasn't seeing things. The next day I read in the *Daily Mirror* that a ball of light had followed a young couple in Newcastle, in the early hours of the morning. According to the article, it descended over the top of the windscreen of their car while they were driving through a wood (or perhaps it was a lonely stretch of road). So was it the same object? And if so, what exactly was it?
Yours faithfully,
*D. Wiles* Sheffield

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*Janet and Colin Bord are continuing their research into sightings of mystery cats (see page 2270) – and, indeed, of any other inexplicable animals. They would be delighted to receive readers' accounts of their own sightings of big cats or dogs. These should be sent to: Janet and Colin Bord, Melangell House, Princes Street, Montgomery, Powys SY15 6PY.*

Send *your* letters to THE UNEXPLAINED, Orbis House, 20–22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

THE WORLD'S MYSTERIOUS PLACES – 44
The Holestone, Doagh, County Antrim, Northern Ireland